

Downtown Height and Density Changes

Final Environmental Impact Statement

January 2005

**City of Seattle
Department of Planning and
Development**



FINAL
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
FOR
DOWNTOWN HEIGHT AND DENSITY CHANGES

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Prepared in compliance with:
State Environmental Policy Act
Chapter 43.21, Revised Code of Washington
Chapter 197-11, Washington Administrative Code

PREFACE

Introduction

On May 3rd, 2001, the City of Seattle Strategic Planning Office issued a SEPA Determination of Significance (DS) for a proposal to change several existing zoning provisions for a portion of Downtown Seattle. This proposal originates from concepts expressed in the neighborhood plans for the Denny Triangle neighborhood and the Commercial Core, as well as the plan prepared by the Downtown Urban Center Planning Group (DUCPG). Numerous discussions between neighborhood stakeholders and City staff since 1999 have helped define a proposal that is being advanced for further discussion and decisionmaking.

FINAL EIS ORGANIZATION

This Final EIS is organized as follows: **Chapter 1** describes the newly defined Preferred Alternative that was developed since publication of the Draft EIS; **Chapter 2** provides a description of the four alternatives evaluated in the Draft EIS; **Chapter 3** provides discussion of several "key issues and findings" identified as a result of the Draft EIS analysis and commentary on it; **Chapter 4** contains a summary of impacts and mitigation measures (reproducing and expanding upon Chapter 1 of the Draft EIS) that includes new analysis of impacts for the Preferred Alternative; and **Chapter 5** which contains responses to public comments received on the Draft EIS. A transcript of public spoken comments from two meetings and responses to those comments is included in Appendix A.

SEPA NON-PROJECT REVIEW

Pursuant to the State's SEPA requirements, this environmental impact statement has been prepared to examine the potential for environmental impacts from this proposal. This is a "non-project" proposal in that it involves decisions on policies, plans or regulations rather than a single site-specific project. In this case, the proposal is for changes to regulations in the Land Use Code. The analysis is intended to describe how the proposed regulatory changes would affect future long-term development patterns, and whether those changes would result in significant adverse impacts. The intent of this EIS is to provide substantive analysis of impact implications (at a programmatic level of detail), to aid in making final decisions on the proposal.

The State's SEPA rules and handbook provide for flexibility in the content and formatting of environmental review for non-project proposals, because details about the proposal are typically limited. Topics that should be addressed include: background, objectives, existing conditions, description of the proposal and alternatives, and environmental impact analysis. The level of analysis should be consistent with the specificity of the proposal and available information.

Broad analyses of non-project proposals can facilitate "phased review" by addressing bigger-picture concerns and allowing review of future proposals to focus on a smaller range of more specific concerns. This means that future proposals in the study area could incorporate or refer to portions of this EIS to fulfill their SEPA requirements. This could increase the efficiency of environmental review and expedite permitting processes.

FACT SHEET

Project Title

Downtown Seattle Height and Density Changes

Nature and Location of Proposal

This Final EIS examines five alternatives that cover a range of possible actions for the City Council's consideration. Three of the alternatives (**Alternatives 1, 2 and 3**) consist of different combinations of increases in allowable maximum heights and densities (volumes) of buildings in several Downtown zones. A **"No Action" Alternative (Alternative 4)** is included to assess what is likely to occur over time under the current Land Use Code. The **Preferred Alternative** is a new alternative included in this Final EIS, to represent the Mayor's recommendation for changes to the Downtown zoning.

The area affected by the proposal includes portions of the Denny Triangle, Commercial Core and Belltown neighborhoods within Downtown, but does not include the retail core (zoned DRC), the International District, or Pioneer Square neighborhoods.

Alternative 1 (High End Height and Density Increase) would increase height and density provisions in portions of Downtown zoned Downtown Office Core 1 and 2 (DOC 1, DOC 2), and Downtown Mixed Commercial (DMC). The proposed density changes would increase allowable densities by 3 or 4 FAR (floor area ratio), equivalent to three or four times the property area of a given site. Within the affected area, maximum heights under Alternative 1 would increase by up to:

- 135 feet in the central DOC 1 zone;
- 100 feet in all of the northern DOC 2 and DMC zones in the Denny Triangle;
- 40 and 48 feet (approximately 30 percent increase) in the central DMC zones along 1st Avenue between Pike and Virginia Streets, and in the Western Avenue vicinity, respectively; and
- 72 feet (30 percent increase) in the southern DOC 2 zone, and the DMC zone along 1st Avenue between Union and Columbia, adjacent to the central office core.

Alternatives 2 and 3 consist of height and density increases in fewer areas or lesser amounts of change. Alternative 2 (Concentrated Office Core) would limit changes to the Downtown Office Core zones. Alternative 3 (Residential Emphasis) would increase height and density in most of the office core zones, but would re-orient zoning in some areas to better encourage housing production.

The **Preferred Alternative** would increase densities in the DOC 1 and much of the DOC 2 office core to levels comparable to Alternative 1, and would increase densities in fewer of the DMC zones. It would also increase maximum heights in several of these zones to a higher level than defined in Alternative 1, with highest height limits oriented to

developments including housing. New controls on building bulk would also be adopted to encourage slimmer building profiles.

Proponent	City of Seattle
Lead Agency	City of Seattle Department of Planning and Development 700 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2000 Seattle, WA 98104-5070
Responsible Official	Diane Sugimura
Date of Implementation	The City Council anticipates making decisions on this proposal in 2005.
Contact Person	Dennis Meier City of Seattle Dept. of Planning and Development 700 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2000 Seattle, WA 98104-5070 206-684-8270
Required Approvals	Actions on the proposal will require approval by the City Council.
EIS Authors and Principal Contributors	<p>Primary author, EIS coordination City of Seattle Dept. of Planning and Development staff: Dennis Meier, Gordon Clowers, Lish Whitson</p> <p>Real Estate/Economic consultants Craig Kinzer & Associates The Seneca Group Cushman & Wakefield Heartland</p> <p>Transportation consultant Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas, Inc.</p> <p>Urban Design consultant Otak, Inc.</p>
Location of Background Data	City of Seattle Dept. of Planning and Development 700 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2000 Seattle, WA 98104-5070
FEIS Date of Issuance	January 6, 2005
Nature and Date of Final Action	The City Council is expected to take action in 2005 on the proposal to amend the allowable heights and densities within portions of Downtown.
Availability of Final EIS	Copies of the Final EIS are available for public review at several branches of the Seattle Public Library. Interested parties may obtain copies of the Final EIS at DPD, 20 th floor Key Tower, 700 Fifth Avenue.

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ELEMENTS OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Earth	Not Reviewed
Air Quality.....	Not Reviewed
Water	Not Reviewed
Plants and Animals	Not Reviewed
Energy	Reviewed
Natural Resources.....	Not Reviewed
Environmental Health—Noise	Not Reviewed
Environmental Health—Toxic/hazardous materials	Not Reviewed
Environmental Health—Risk of Explosion.....	Not Reviewed
Land Use.....	Reviewed
Height/Bulk/Scale	Reviewed
Housing	Reviewed
Population and Employment	Reviewed
Historic Preservation	Reviewed
Light and Glare.....	Not Reviewed
Public View Protection.....	Reviewed
Transportation	Reviewed
Parking	Reviewed
Fire/Emergency Protection.....	Not Reviewed
Police Protection.....	Not Reviewed
Schools	Not Reviewed
Parks and Recreation	Not Reviewed
Water Supply	Reviewed
Stormwater Utilities	Reviewed
Sewer	Reviewed
Solid Waste.....	Not Reviewed
Maintenance	Not Reviewed
Communications	Not Reviewed
Other Governmental Services/utilities	Not Reviewed
Shadows on Open Spaces	Reviewed